

Can CAU Become a New Battlefield for Democracy in Korea?

Two 'Parks' of Academia Faces Open Revolts



SEOUL, South Korea — On 2 February at 1pm, about thirty students dressed in black of Chung-Ang University(CAU) started to hold a funeral for “Death of Freedom of the Press in Campus” at the university head quarter. After the ceremony, together with some other students, they tried to visit a room of president Park Bum-hoon, located on 2nd. floor of the building. But just in vain. Officials and staffs set up a barricade with their own bodies

on the stairs heading to the room. While scuffles broke out between some of the students and them, other students staged sit-in on the spot and held the free speech time for an hour. At that time, president Park came back, saw the students, and bursted out. “From when do this university become so unfashionable? Be sophisticated for the change. Stop such a foolish thing, and shame on you!” Leaving the students’s protest, “You should listen up our words” behind his back, president Park hurried to his office escorted by his loyal employees.



WHAT ON EARTH HAPPENS IN THE CAMPUS?. All things began on 10 June 2008, a day when Park Yong-sung, a chairperson of Doosan Heavy Industries & Construction, cut a cake at the new school board chairperson’s inauguration ceremony at the Art Center of the university. Doosan, a Korean conglomerate (‘Jaebol’) comprises 15 subsidiaries spanning beverages, foods, heavy machinery and power plants. The group’s total sales in 2007 reached 18.6 trillion won.

When Mr. Park became a new chairperson of the school board, saying “CAU has the potential to become a world-class university …… I will promote CAU with school professors and students

as a world-renowned university,” some considerable numbers of them at CAU welcomed the new boss, especially his ambitions and the great wealth. Of course, there’s a handful of people who felt doubt and uncertainty, their voice were overwhelmed. Founded in Seoul in 1918, CAU has been one of the leading private universities in theater, film, design, and liberal arts. From 1980, however, the enforcement of an impractical investments in the newly-born Anseong Campus in Gyeonggi Province, 80km south of Seoul, had caused a great and permanent financial impact on the overall operation of the CAU. In such a circumstance, Doosan took over CAU spending some 120 billion won (approx. \$120 million).



For the first step toward his own ambitions, chairperson Park strongly pushed ahead with ‘corporate-style’ reform plans, including assessments and incentive schemes for professors, and restructuring departments. On 2 March 2009, under the control of the business-minded chairperson, another Park (president Park Bum-hoon) has introduced a merit-based annual salary system for professors. This is a first among Korean universities, and the school will grade professors into four groups – those belonging to C, or the bottom 10 percent will have their salaries frozen at current levels.

Though a group of faculty members and students called for a halt, president Park wouldn’t budge an inch. On 14 August 2009, far from listening the protest, he fired Jin Jung-gwon, a part-time professor in the German Language and Literature department, who has been critical of chairperson Park’s reform plan. Critics claimed political motivation was factored into the decision, for he, as a member and honorary ambassador of New Progressive Party, has been one of the sharp critics for the Lee Myung-bak administration, even before President Lee was a mayor of Seoul. Since the Lee administration was launched, both the Korea National University of Arts and CAU have scrapped his classes in turn, and finally KAIST did, too. Who can say this was just a coincidence?



Indeed, two Park at CAU has been a loyal vassal of President Lee. During the Presidential election campaign in 2007, Park Bum-hoon headed the Lee election committee’s cultural policy sector under the official title of cultural adviser. And Park Yong-sung, as the president of the Korea Sports Council, has played a decoy role for the Lee administration to give a special pardon to former Samsung Group chairperson Lee Kun-hee, saying that the Samsung owner who was ex-IOC member would give hope to Gangwon residents, who have been frustrated by two past unsuccessful bids for the Winter Olympics. Chairperson Lee voluntarily suspended his membership on the IOC following his conviction in 2008 for his involvement in

tax evasion and breach of trust, and he was given a three-year prison term suspended for five years and fined 110 billion won (\$95 million). The bidding committee for the 2018 Olympics under Park Yong-sung has ceaselessly asked President Lee to pardon the former chairperson to ensure a successful bid, and has also called for his reinstatement as an IOC member. On 29 December 2009, the presidential spokeswoman Kim Eun-hye pardoned chairperson Lee to help Pyeongchang's bid for hosting the 2018 Winter Olympics.

BACK TO THE MAIN STORY. The next step was taken on 29 December, 2009. In this time, the two Parks showed their tremendous drive like President 'Bulldozer' Lee. The head-quarter announced a plan calling for merging or scraping departments with similar or overlapping functions to turn CAU currently consisting of 18 colleges (divided into 77 departments) into the one consisting of 10 colleges, divided into 40 faculties and departments.



Under the plan, CAU also seeks to organize the 10 colleges into five units, which will be headed by five vice presidents with authority concerning budget, personnel management, professor appointment, and research support.

Moreover, chairperson Park designated basic accounting as a compulsory subject and required students to have a double major in order to graduate. Students with a grade point average (GPA) lower than 1.75 are put under academic probation. Previously, the lower limit was set at 1.5 points. Basically, the chairperson is putting more focus on departments of business administration and engineering, medicine and law.

Chairperson Park's position was made clear in a column he wrote about the 'ownership' of the university in August, claiming that the right to make decisions about the school belongs to the school management, not to students or professors. The impression was that chairperson Park is running the school as he would manage a business.

Most professors and students concur on the need for restructuring, but maintain that it should proceed slowly with careful considerations of the characteristics of a university. "A concrete plan for restructuring has not been created yet. But I oppose the plan to appoint five vice presidents," said Kim Nu-ry, a German literature professor. "With the vice presidents (controlling five university divisions), a corporate-style pyramid structure will be created, which is in principle incongruous with a university, which needs a democratic decision-making structure. A university is an academic community for professors and students where freedom and equality should be ensured." Of course, all the students demanded that their voices be reflected in the restructuring plan. "There is still no official response from the university to our request for our participation (in the decision-making process). There are two groups working on crafting restructuring plans and students want to have a right to choose one of the two after hearing how they have been crafted," said Lim Ji-hye, student council chief at CAU.

The “Death of Freedom of the Press in Campus” funeral above was held against the one latest piece of the puzzle made by two Parks. *Chung-Ang Munwha* and *Nok-ji*, two biannual student magazines at CAU has criticized chairperson Park’s corporate-style reform initiatives ignoring the opinions of school members and the unique traits of academia. Especially, on 25 November 2009, *Chung-Ang Munwha* published a cartoon and an articles which was very critical of the top-down restructuring plan, each entitled “CAU Democracy at Risk,” and “How does a Big Corporate Govern a University?”(*Chung-Ang Munwha*, issue 58, 2009/Winter) On that day, Jang Young-jun, an associate English literature professor and head of Press/News Media Management Team forcibly ordered his men to pickup all copies of *Chung-Ang Munwha* not to be seen by two Parks. In addition to this, on 13 January 2010, president Park announced via professor Jang that all of finance (about 35 million won/approx. \$30.3 thousands) to the *Chung-Ang Munwha* and *Nok-ji* this year would be cut: a retaliatory action.



► President Park in the cartoon says like this: “This university is not yours, but of chairperson Park’s own.” So students refutes it by saying “What? But you said before that students are also the owner of this university!”

Professor Jang always said that he is proud of himself for being a student of Noam Chomsky, who is one of leading intellectual figure within the left wing of American politics. Indeed, professor Jang got the degree of Doctor of Linguistics at Harvard University with a Ph.D. dissertation titled “Tense and Complementizer Feature-Checking,” and professor Chomsky was one of his dissertation committee members in 1997. So thus, the students of CAU are laughing at professor Jang saying that he should have learned not only linguistics but also politics from Chomsky, or should have read his book, *The Responsibility of Intellectuals* (1967), *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (2002), or if there’s no enough time to read a difficult one, *Chomsky on Democracy and Education* (2002).

Pro-Government/Chaebol media complex Cho-Joong-Dong, which occupies 58% of the news-paper subscription market (in 2008), and has played a great role to attack all of progressive and democratic movements, has welcomed the corporate-style reform of CAU under chairperson Park, and insisted that other private (even national and public) universities should follow CAU reform model to strengthen so called ‘global competitiveness.’ And as you can anticipate easily, Cho-Joong-Dong has seldom reported the resistances at CAU against such a violent reform initiatives. In this bad condition, the two student magazine *Chung-Ang Munwha* and *Nok-ji* has struggled desperately to let CAU students know what happens in the university, and to gather and draw public attentions on it. However, as the Lee Myung-bak administration tried to and succeeded in manipulating media to suit its political tastes by appointing executives to state-run broadcasting and some key public enterprises who are his supporters, two Parks and one Jang put a gag on the press for criticizing them.

Just before two Parks fired Jin Jung-gwon who has been critical of CAU reform plan, the Lee Myung-bak administration forced the former president Hwang Chi-woo of Korea National University of Arts (K-Arts) resigned. By curious audit conducted from 18 March to 1 May 2009, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism insisted that the former president made misappropriation of school funds and mismanagement of school affairs and curriculum. The government claimed that Hwang misappropriated 8 million won of government subsidies by using funds for other purposes and took overseas trips without due process.

Also, the ministry said the school's curriculum doesn't fit the founding purpose of the school, which is to offer practical arts training. However, professors and students said that the government audit is 'targeted,' because Culture minister Yu In-chon (alas! he was also a professor at CAU) has pressed the government-funded institution leaders, who were appointed under the previous left-leaning Roh Moo-hyun administration, to quit their posts since his inauguration. That is why many observers and critics say that the latest CAU scandal is the microcosm what is happening in this country as a whole.

But in this case, IT TURNS OUT TO BE THE LATEST LITMUS PAPER that will show the direction of university's self-government, or by extension, the future of democracy in Korea.

On 2 February 2010, during a visit to the Korea Student Aid Foundation, President Lee Myung-bak said "It would be great if the fees were low. But if tuition is too cheap, then it could bring down the quality of education." A 2009 OECD Report placed Korea (almost 10 million won annually) second after the United States on the list of the top 10 countries in average tuition fees. It is more expensive to study at Korean universities than those in Japan, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. But the latest surveys indicate that the tuition hikes are not proportional with the level of education provided by Korean universities. An OECD report rated Korea 51st among 57 countries in its index of university competitiveness. While universities in Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan placed highly in the Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings published last year, no Korean university managed to make it into the top 40.

So thus university student councils all around country are preparing to fight against this irrational tuition hike. In such a mood in which university authorities get to be under pressure, if the CAU scandal can be model that, as Cho-Joong-Dong hope, other universities will follow to oppress the voice of protest within. The 2008 anti-mad cow (U.S. beef) demonstration was the previous litmus paper for democracy in Korea. Now, it matters not food for bodies but food for souls. And ultimately both cases was, are, and will also be the matter of democracy. With growing protests from the students at CAU and other universities, two Parks of academia faces open revolts. Without attentions from all levels of society, however, this voice will be subdued, and it will be another terrible blow to democracy in Korea. (*fin.*)





